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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/21/2017  
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [SNAR](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [GT](#)  
SUBJECT: JOURNALISTS LEVEL DUBIOUS ACCUSATIONS AGAINST  
PARTIDO PATRIOTA

Classified By: Ambassador James M. Derham for reasons 1.4 (b&d).

¶1. (C) Summary. One the eve of the November 4 presidential elections, journalists investigating alleged ties between Partido Patriota Presidential candidate Perez Molina and the Mendoza drug trafficking organization claimed to have received death threats and said the editors of their paper "El Periodico" had decided to quash their story. The editor of "El Periodico," whose editorial line favored Perez Molina's opponent in the campaign, printed a full page disclaimer of the journalists' allegations, saying that the paper had decided not to print their story because it was poorly documented and was motivated by partisan interests. The allegations of the two journalists received some press play in the final days before the elections. The journalists have told us that they do not fear for their lives. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On October 30, "El Periodico" investigative journalists Carlos Enrique Castaneda Boer and Hilda Emelina Merida Mendez met with Pol/Econ Couns to say that they had been the object of death threats, surveillance, and other harassment against themselves and their families. Castaneda said that, in addition to repeated telephone death threats, he had received an invitation to his own funeral and a funeral floral bouquet. Castaneda and Merida said they assumed the threats and harassment were from persons associated with the Partido Patriota, political party of then-presidential contender General Otto Perez Molina, though they had no proof. Castaneda and Merida said their superiors had instructed them months ago to prepare a report on allegations of corruption and complicity in narcotrafficking against Perez Molina and his closest collaborators. They had duly prepared the report, and found that members of the notorious Mendoza narcotics trafficking family had at one time been members of the Partido Patriota. Furthermore, they had uncovered a check to Patriota Deputy Roxanna Baldetti for Q88,000 (approximately \$11,733), as well as evidence that Perez Molina had accepted a donation of a Toyota SUV, possibly in violation of the law. Furthermore, they reiterated old allegations that Perez Molina had embezzled Q19,000,000 (approximately \$2.5 million) during his tenure as Commander of the Presidential Guard, and claimed to have found new evidence supporting the accusation, but did not share it.

¶3. (C) Castaneda and Merida said they felt betrayed by their bosses because they had declined to publish their report on the eve of the Nov. 4 runoff election, which pitted Otto

Perez Molina against Alvaro Colom of the UNE. (Colom won.) Furthermore, "El Periodico" directors had declined even to condemn publicly the threats against them. Disappointed by this lack of support from their newspaper, the pair reported the threats to the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office, as well as to international NGOs, including the Overseas Press Club of America, as well as different diplomatic missions in Guatemala City. Pol/Econ Couns conveyed our strong support for press freedom in Guatemala, and offered to explore the possibility of arranging for a temporary stay in the U.S. if they believed their lives to be in imminent danger. The pair responded that they did not believe they were in danger. Qresponded that they did not believe they were in danger.

¶4. (C) In a separate conversation with Pol/Econ Couns, "El Periodico" Director Juan Luis Font characterized Castaneda and Merida's comportment as unprofessional. He said the newspaper strives to uphold international journalistic standards of impartiality. Publication of such an investigative piece on the eve of the presidential election would have been an overtly political act, he said. Furthermore, the pair's treatment of the facts had been selective and incomplete. For example, they demonstrated that some of the Mendoza family had at one time been members of the Partido Patriota, as Perez Molina himself had publicly acknowledged. However, they had failed to examine Perez Molina's claim that, once the Mendozas' criminal activities had become known, the party had expelled them. Such selective reporting fit a broader pattern that indicated a clear political agenda, he said.

¶5. (U) In a November 7 editorial, "El Periodico" owner Jose Ruben Zamora accused Castaneda and Merida of having partisan political motivations for their reporting. He wrote that Castaneda's investigation never turned up documentary evidence of Mendoza family financing of the Partido Patriota,

and that Hilda Merida had never worked on the investigation at all. Rather, she had joined Castaneda in making denunciations as an act of solidarity. When questioned by her direct supervisor at the newspaper, Merida had said that she never received any threats. "We cannot allow ourselves the luxury of publishing investigations that are not serious, the origins of which are groundless speculation and rumors," Zamora wrote.

¶6. (C) Comment: El Periodico was widely viewed as opposing Otto Perez Molina's candidacy for President and it is not surprising that they commissioned an investigative report to look into possible misdeeds by Perez Molina. The fact that the editors were not prepared to print an investigative report that they found lacking in factual merit on the eve of the election speaks well for the integrity of the paper. Castaneda and Merida's claims that they were the object of death threats are worrisome, if true, and the Ombudsman for Human Rights has agreed to investigate their case.  
Derham